

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
Vol. 7, No. 2
Editor: Kent Harker

1987 PSYCHIC PREDICTIONS
by Robert Sheaffer

[Each year, "BASIS" runs the results of the predictions the best psychics have foretold. One of the most effective tools they have is the public's poor memory. If one is not called to account for what he or she says, almost anything goes.

This feature has been a favorite over the years, because "BASIS" readers can keep it for reference when someone begins to follow how well psychics do with their foreknowledge. -- Ed.]

U.S. planes did not attack Iran, killing the Ayatollah. Caroline Kennedy Schlosberg, Princess Diana, Princess Fergie, and Madonna did not have babies. There were no assassination attempts against the Pope, and against Mikhail Gorbachev. Ted Kennedy did not marry (or remarry), and Interstate 280 did not wash out in San Jose. These were just a few of the many things that had been predicted to occur during 1987 by famous psychics, but failed to happen.

At the end of each year, many well-known psychics issue predictions for the coming year. Twelve months later, they issue another set of predictions, conveniently forgetting those made the year before, which are always nearly 100% wrong. Each year, however, the Bay Area Skeptics dig up the predictions made the year before, nearly always to the embarrassment of those who made them.

Many of the psychic predictions made are so vague that it is impossible to say if they came true or not: for example, Jeane Dixon's prediction that Gorbachev "will puzzle American policy makers," or that "this will be another difficult year for Boy George," is not clearly true or false. Many other predictions involve things that happen every year, or else are not difficult to guess, such as tornadoes in the midwest, hurricanes in Florida, or continued terrorist incidents.

Many predictions simply state that ongoing problems will continue, such as unrest in South Africa, or fighting in Central America. Other supposed predictions are not really predictions at all, but are actually disclosures of little-known events which are already under way, such as movie productions, business ventures, or celebrity activities. While some predictions did of course come true, especially those that were non-specific, or not at all difficult to guess, not ONE prediction which was both specific AND

surprising came true.

The famous Washington, D.C. psychic Jeane Dixon, who supposedly has a "gift of prophecy," predicted a baby for Caroline Kennedy Schlosberg, a second marriage for her uncle Ted Kennedy, and pregnancies for Lady Diana and for Fergie. The art market was supposed to go bust, but record prices were set in art auctions. The year held "great economic promise," she said, while the stock market first boomed, then crashed. "Many Americans would be kidnaped for ransom," she said, "but a rescue mission would be attempted, leading to loss of life." There would be another "tragic" airspace confrontation with the Soviet Union, and a new super-fertilizer would produce fruits and vegetables "right out of "Jack and the Beanstalk." She DID correctly predict, however, that Liz Taylor would NOT get married this year, a prediction which was at least a LITTLE surprising.

New York psychic Shawn Robbins predicted that Prince Charles would appear on TV to bend spoons psychically, like Uri Geller; that Monaco's Prince Albert would renounce his throne, and that the world's biggest oil field would be discovered in Kentucky.

Los Angeles psychic Marie Graciette predicted that Soviet party boss Mikhail Gorbachev would be wounded in an assassination attempt by one of his own soldiers during the May Day parade in Moscow. She also predicted that the mayor of a large American city would undergo a sex-change operation, then win re-election as a woman!

Denver psychic Lou Wright predicted that Ted and Joan Kennedy would remarry, and that Burt Reynolds would fall madly in love with Vanna White, prompting Loni Anderson to sue Burt for "palimony."

Chicago psychic Irene Hughes predicted that the U.S. would launch a massive military attack on Iran, killing the Ayatollah, and that Monaco's Princess Stephanie would lie in a coma for months following a drug overdose.

In San Jose, California, psychic Sylvia Brown predicted that Ronald Reagan would seek a third term, but would "be vetoed or voted out," and that there would be a large earthquake "around Mill Valley and Grass Valley." (This is an especially peculiar prediction, since those two small towns are more than 100 miles apart, with Sacramento lying between them!) She also foresaw that part of Interstate Highway 280 would be washed away in San Jose in June (a month which had virtually NO rainfall), that there would be an assassination attempt on the Pope in London in July, and that a major breakthrough would be made in the treatment of Muscular Dystrophy, using amino acids.

While believing that it is important to carefully EXAMINE such claims, the Bay Area Skeptics emphasize that unsupported claims are not to be accepted without proof merely because they sound interesting and exciting. In science, the burden of proof is always on the person making the extraordinary claim, and not on the one

who disbelieves it. Thus, the burden of proof rests squarely on the psychic to prove that his or her powers are real -- a demonstration that not one of them has yet been able to make.

No psychic succeeded in predicting the GENUINELY surprising news stories of 1987: the Dow Jones Industrial Average soaring to stratospheric heights, then falling more than 500 points in a single day; Nancy Reagan's surgery for breast cancer; the downing of a jetliner by a revengeful ex-employee who shot the flight crew; or the unexpected withdrawal of Gary Hart from the Presidential race over a sex scandal, and his equally unexpected re-entry into the race late in the year. These major news stories were so unanticipated that someone would have had to be psychic to have predicted them. Given the number of self-proclaimed psychics out there, one would expect that somebody would have -- unless, of course, all such claims of psychic powers are without foundation.

BAS GOES ON-LINE

Starting last November, interested parties have had a new forum: a computer bulletin board called "Child". This BBS is in San Francisco at (415) 467-2780, 8 bits, no parity, 1 stop bit.

The SysOp, Howard Burton, has provided a Skeptics' Message Area for articles and public discussion. Board members Rick Moen and Yves Barbero are assistant SysOps for that area, so there are lively discussions and interesting topics.

Ring 'em up and promote the skeptics in the computer world. Some of the discussion might come out in "BASIS".

[3-24-89, Rick Moen's note: The "Child" BBS closed down in the summer of 1988. However, BAS opened its own BBS in October, "The Skeptic's Board", at 415-648-8944.]

RAMPARTS

[Ramparts is a regular feature of "BASIS", and your participation is urged. Clip, snip and tear bits of irrationality from your local scene and send them to THE EDITOR. If you want to add some comment with the submission, please do so.]

What happens when it is revealed that a psychic cheats? Skeptics tend to think that parapsychologists will push the cheater aside with an embarrassed bow to the revelations. Alas, this is not the case. Such events don't even ruffle feathers on the dedicated skins of the same. "Sadly," [a parapsychologist] said, "mediums often cheat but that is no proof that they may not be genuinely psychic, too."

True. Al Capone's crimes are not stand-alone proof that the guy didn't have a heart of gold.

This latest pronouncement was reiterated at the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) international convention held in England in the address of Ian Wilson, a self-proclaimed debunker. Wilson declared that he had indisputable proof that (the late) Doris Stokes, a popular medium in England, was a fraud.

The story, printed in "The Guardian", detailed that Wilson attended Stokes' sell-out London Palladium performances and then interviewed the people who had received messages from their departed. The most startling one had come for a woman named Dawn from her dead husband, Graham. Doris relayed a miraculous message that "he had died after a fall from scaffolding, shortly after the birth of their first baby." Ms. Stokes also comforted Dawn that "...she had been right to allow the hospital to switch off his respirator and let him die in peace."

Dawn was deeply moved.

When Wilson interviewed her later, Dawn revealed that in fact she had phoned Stokes when her husband was on a respirator to ask her advice about having it turned off. Just one week later, Stokes called Dawn and offered her a free, ring-side seat at her Palladium performance. Dawn was dazzled by Stokes' contact with Graham, apparently making no association whatever between her own conversation with Stokes before the performance!

Ian then produced proof that ALL THE REST of the front-row seats were occupied by those who had been previously contacted by Doris. In spite of the ingenuousness and blatancy of her methods, she practiced for years, reaping the profits from sales of millions of books in many languages, personal readings, and performances such as those in the Palladium. She was never the subject of even mildly critical investigations until Wilson looked in.

Is there sound reason to believe that Ms. Stokes wrought any havoc during her sojourn on the planet? Is it safe to say that the credulity exercised by those bereaved visitors to her parlor likely cost the patrons more than their money?

If we could contact Doris we would probably hear her laughing.

Skeptic Frank Davidoff got himself on the mailing list of a publication, "The Etherion Chronicles", that recounts the latest dope channeled from Etherion, a soul wandering in the etheric plane.

"Someone asked Etherion in mid-September what teams would play in the World Series."

Etherion replied, in classic psychic-ese, "There would be some

surprises in the play-offs."

Sure enough, he was right. Some of the staff at the channeling center even confessed that they had hoped Etherion would be wrong because they didn't want to see the Giants lose. Of course, had the Giants won, that, too, would have been a surprise. In most cases, surprise means unknown, so there's plenty of latitude for Etherion.

In a question/answer section of the publication, a reader asked Etherion if someone who had a past life in an ancient civilization could decipher texts which had not been decoded. In two lengthy paragraphs of ornate circumlocution, Etherion enunciated a definite maybe.

We've all wondered what it is like on the other side. Etherion tells that it's so much like regular hum-drum that most of the people don't even realize they've croaked.

Maybe that answers Woody Allen if there's sex in the afterlife. If you want to put such impertinent questions to Etherion, do it through his (her?) channel, Nancy, at P.O. Box 6324, Albany, CA 94706.

The "Chronicle" warns that psychic forces can be dangerous if they are not carefully directed. Psychic Mary Cannon of Oakland had been to a spoon-bending seminar sponsored by the Berkeley Psychic Institute. She was unable to twist utensils, but she had cranked up her energies nevertheless. On leaving the meeting, she forgot to turn them down, and two days later her car would not budge. Her mechanic found the valves all twisted in a manner he had never seen before. It was then that she remembered the seminar.

At last report she was trying unsuccessfully to psychically unbend the valves and had to pay the garage to put new ones in.

CHANNELING ST. MARY

It had to happen. It was only a matter of time. The "Psychic Reader", a Berkeley New Age paper, printed an interview with the Rev. Mary Fulton of the Aesclepiion Healing Center's Women's Trance Medium Healing Clinic. The Virgin Mary, wife of Joseph, took time from her busy schedule to grant a channeling interview with Rev. Fulton for "P.R."

Some salient comments from St. Mary:

P.R.: "How do you react to people praying to you all the time?"

Mary: "The person with the strongest mockup gets answered first. I also got to work very fast because a lot of people call at once."

The interview goes on to reveal that Mary had a lot of pain and joy experiencing her son grow up and die. She tells us that the way she was able to prepare for all that responsibility was through the many, many previous lives she had led.

When asked about a message she might have for the world, Mary replied, "A calm, a joy, a peace, there's no hurry."

So, tell your friends that if they've been praying to The Blessed Mother oh these many years in a one-way conversation, Rev. Fulton can tune them in and let them know what Mary herself thinks about the whole shebang.

SKEPTICS ABOUND

The work of CSICOP is reaching out widely. Examination of the print medium of late shows a tremendous increase in the number of articles skeptical of paranormal claims.

Time was that the field was left to the outrageous by default. The paranormal is unusual, and unusual is what newspapers thrive upon. Until the founding of CSICOP, there was no concerted effort to counter the torrent of nonsense parading before a naive public. Since there was no counter offered, the public has been led to believe there IS no counter.

The efforts of CSICOP have bolstered the courage of hundreds of devoted people who have formed local groups like BAS (BAS was the first group). The results are positive, encouraging, and measurable.

Local groups are not restricted to the U.S. We don't know if "BASIS" gets overseas, but we received a news clipping from a Dutch newspaper about the visit of James Randi. Dutch. In Dutch. "Het bekendste voorbeeld van debunking door de CSICOP."

Special note: BAS advisor Dr. Eugenie Scott has been nominated to join the advisory board of CSICOP. Congratulations, Genie.

EDITOR'S CORNER

by Kent Harker

A lot of correspondence is received by the Bay Area Skeptics and some of it, relating to our objectives, is directed to me. Much is frivolous, some clearly from cranks -- the rest is hard to define. These people are serious, however, and most believe they are really onto something.

One of the things I used to ask myself is why they don't take what

they have to the scientific community for review? It is probably because the typical inquirer is not a scientist and is not familiar with scientific protocol. They wouldn't know where to begin. With BAS they at least have an address and therefore some place to start.

A case in point concerns an organization called Spindrift. I have corresponded for a couple of months with some of their principals.

Spindrift was apparently formed about four years ago from within a group of Christian Science practitioners. They resemble the 19th century spiritualism movement that led to the founding of the Society for Parapsychology Research (SPR) in England to discover a scientific basis for alleged spirit phenomena.

Spindrift seeks to establish scientific evidence for the validity of healing prayer. In this endeavor they find themselves in a cross fire. Their fellow religious do not believe that matters of faith can or should be under the microscope, while people on the outside openly scoff. The unhappiness of the former probably relates to the reaction of the latter.

Christian Science, Jehovah's Witness, and other Christian sects have come under fire in the wake of deaths that have occurred when medical attention has been refused. Many people accept this but draw the line when the refusing is being done by parents on behalf of their children. Spindrift was formed to present evidence that healing prayers do in fact work -- scientific evidence. And they have challenged skeptics to accept their work for the skeptic's challenge. They are after both James Randi's \$10,000 and BAS's \$11,000 rewards.

How does one scientifically test the validity of a claim of prayer healing? It would seem very simple: Pray over someone's verified compound fracture and then re-xray to see if it is knitted after the prayer. But this straightforward and modest proposal is not what Spindrift suggests. They have broken new ground with their approach to demonstrating the efficacy of prayer. They allege they are able to influence a random generator to behave non-randomly by their prayers.

Even if it were conceded that their prayers could somehow influence the random generator, does it follow that the same prayer could arrest a metastatic cancer? A successful demonstration only implies that if you have a good random generator you would like to have screwed up you could call your local Christian Science practitioner. (Paranormal effects on random generators have been claimed before. Parapsychologists report that cockroaches and unhatched chickens produce the same psychic influences.)

I don't know if any kind of test will ever come out of the work of Spindrift, but the claim and the way they propose it is interesting for the way it is a portrayal of pseudoscience.

Spindrifft has formed an ad hoc committee, named CSIPHOO (the acronym is too forced to spell it all out), to challenge skeptics. Their offer is, for \$1,000, "Explain, using only scientific principles, why prayer is NOT responsible for the non-random behavior of the random generator." They have thus shifted the burden of proof and asked their antagonists to prove a universal negative. Their money is as safe as the sunrise. All the natural explanations in the world would not demonstrate that it is [not] due to the prayers. Spindrifft makes a claim, and they must demonstrate that claim on its own merits.

One of the more common complaints raised in communications I have had with the associates of Spindrifft is that James Randi does not hold any formal qualifications as a scientific investigator ("...[CSICOP] employs investigators who have backgrounds in professional deception."), and yet he is named as the principal investigator of CSICOP. Yes, Randi is a professional deceiver all right. But he is an HONEST deceiver, being a professional magician, because he tells us he is going to trick us before he starts.

Since many (I think a majority) of the claims offered to CSICOP involve fraud or self-deceit, there must be someone who is an expert on fraud and self-deceit. You need an eel trap to catch an eel. Randi is a highly qualified expert in this. His understanding of his own limitations is evidenced by the fact that he usually gathers up a coterie of local physicists, psychologists, astronomers, etc., who can take over where he leaves off when he travels some place to conduct an investigation.

So, what, specifically is the claim of Spindrifft? A couple of quotes from the latest correspondence shows what I think is a clear misunderstanding of science in general and probability in particular.

"It is easily predictable from our theoretical base that the laws of probability which govern falling dice (something parapsychologists would be interested in) don't wholly apply but are affected by the mind of the individual throwing the dice."

Parapsychologists have in fact been interested in the ability of "mind over matter" (psychokinesis) for a long time -- they've been influencing dice for decades in the laboratories, but never in Vegas. But the fact is, the laws of probability do not govern anything. The laws of physics govern falling dice. The laws of probability can only suggest the likelihood of the outcome of a particular sample assuming the sample is based upon randomness.

Another clue to the problem: "The test is very clean in the sense that all data is [sic] produced with a computer by the computer itself. The data is [sic] then analyzed by the computer and the results are then flashed on the monitor."

Why assume that the test is "clean" because it is accomplished with a computer? Do computers ever make errors? More importantly, are

the programs that run on the computer free of error and human bias?

It is very difficult to write a program that will consistently crank out random numbers. Most work for awhile and then break down. The well-known Bell Curve predicts that even the very best random generator will sometimes exhibit periods of non-randomness. On the surface of it, Spindrift's claim appears to amount to the same amorphous mass as that of parapsychology: statistics are a substitute for theory. The claim seems to be simply that their prayers will influence a random generator to become non-random. Specifically, THEIR random generator, on THEIR computer prayed upon by THEM.

All in all, the claim is about as nebulous as painting a picture on a pond. With water colors.

I gave Spindrift an example of a testable claim: On ANY properly functioning computer, with ANY properly functioning random generator program, ANY person offering a specific Christian Science prayer for 20 minutes will cause the generator to become non-random with $p < .001$. If a Hindu prayer is offered, the generator will return to random within 5 seconds. Run this test twenty times.

(For those who sit around the hearth pulling barbecued chicken apart at dinner, not knowing what the meaning of "p" is, a little explanation. In English. P is a measure of significance one wishes to place on a set of trials. The value of p (between 0 and 1) must be chosen before the experiment begins, and that value may then be used as a guide to ascertain the significance of a deviation from expectation. The smaller the value of p, the more significance is attached to an outcome. For some concerns a significance of .99 would be sufficient because deviation from the norm would be so unlikely as to make ANY variation strongly suggest that something highly unusual is occurring. Since random generators may deviate substantially, rather large variations from expectation are not cause for great interest, and p values of .05 to .001 would be reasonable to require.)

There are difficulties in this suggestion, to be sure, but it is specific enough to be able to say when and how one has failed to substantiate the claim if the alleged outcome does not occur. The same cannot be said of Spindrift's statement (I cannot even call it a claim).

I still think the simplest test would be to pray over a compound fracture and then x-ray the results and be done with it. Maybe that's why they don't offer their claim this way.

Is anything useful accomplished by all of this? Yes. And I think it is education. Not that mountains are being leveled, but people are becoming aware that there is some earth-moving equipment out there. The very fact that there is active confrontation to the stream of nonsense that daily pours upon our heads is significant. Time was when the nonsense won by default.

'87 PREDICTIONS TRUE

If you are unimpressed because of the failure of the '87 psychic predictions in the feature article, you have just not heard the word from the inside. The Berkeley Psychic Institute keeps records too, and printed the results of a year's work. It's safe to say they picked their best efforts, and maybe omitted the stinkers. Let's see how they see themselves. "BASIS" remarks are in parentheses.

"Looking at the economy, the psychics predicted that the Dow Jones Average and the stock market would be very erratic, with a general upward trend." (!)

"The market has had several big rises and falls, but overall has been gaining...." (!!)

"Gold and silver would rise." (..)

"Major controversy in the Catholic Church. We hit this one right on." (!!!)

"Reagan would be involved with right-wing churches involving covert activities. We were close, because of the Bakkers and Contragate." (?)

"We predicted major earthquakes, and they occurred throughout the world." (...)

"Many predictions concerned events difficult to track in the headlines, (read: so vague you couldn't find them at noon in the desert) such as that many aboriginal groups will reawaken their spiritual pasts and aliens will become more active.

"Psychics are notoriously poor at being on time, and this affects predictions, too. Several predictions made in late 1985 for 1986 came true in 1987." (This is the best one. Make a prediction that will come true SOMETIME. "BASIS" predicts that Shemp will be channeled by a world leader to give the play-by-play at Wimbledon.)

Actually, things don't look much different from the inside.

HOW TO THINK: CRUCIAL LESSONS

by David Glidden

[Dr. Glidden, professor of philosophy at U.C. Riverside, writes frequently for the "L.A. Times" -- he did this article for them. When I requested permission to run it in "BASIS", I also asked him

to do an expanded, feature article for us in the near future. He agreed on both requests, and added that he had received a lot of contact as a result of this article: People calling him to tell that they, too, were Cheyenne warriors in a past life.

I assured him that "BASIS" readers would not crash by the point of his writing. -- Ed.]

It's the inevitable consequence of student-faculty contact: A young woman approached me after class, embarrassed by what she had to tell me, something too personal to discuss on campus. I agreed to meet her at a local coffee-house. There, she confessed what was on her mind: "You were once a Cheyenne warrior in a previous existence, and I nursed you back to health after you'd been wounded by an arrow through your heart." The only response that I could think of was to thank her.

This was a serious student, quite proficient at deciphering Plato for me and whatever information tasks her other courses required. She was also quite convinced that she's lived other lives, convinced enough that, despite grinding poverty and two children to support, she attends seminars on previous existence twice a week.

Nothing that she might have learned in biology about how neurons grow and memories worked could have persuaded her that it is physically impossible to carry memories over from another life -- if even such a continuity of life were credible. That there might be others who have our same personality, contemporaries even, was not the sort of thing that would satisfy her, especially considering the implication that there might then be many other selves of hers living on the planet Earth. There might be something specifically Californian about incidents such as this, but I suspect they are not regional; they testify to a certain persistence of irrationality among people everywhere.

Socrates said that learning was first and foremost a process of discovering what it is we wrongly thought we knew, of first exposing ignorance, before going on to knowledge. Merely adding bits of wisdom to a mass of foolishness will not make people wiser. It will increase the danger of their ignorance.

Lately, hundreds of thousands of Americans have been worrying about what has gone wrong with higher education, worrying enough to put Alan Bloom's "The Closing of the American Mind" and E. D. Hirsch's "Cultural Literacy" on the best-seller lists. Bloom tells a story about what went wrong in the stratosphere of Germanic philosophy and its alleged malign influence on American universities. Hirsch composes a list of things every American should know. The trouble is that even if Hirsch and Bloom were right, they would be wrong. It's not what we do not yet know that is the problem; it's all the false things that we already believe, in ignorance.

The claim that I was once a Cheyenne warrior wounded in the heart

would be just as false as the assertions that the Earth is flat, or that the universe was created in six 24-hour days. Covering over such ignorant beliefs with truths taken piecemeal from philosophy, history or technology is as useless an enterprise as covering up a cancer on the skin with make-up; radical surgery is called for.

Socrates's approach to imparting knowledge was to question the beliefs we have, before then adding to them. He devised a method to achieve this and called it dialectic, what we now call conversational reasoning. It was a skill that he taught, how to search for definitions and follow implications.

It remains a tried-and-true technique of looking for inconsistencies and detecting ghostly metaphors haunting our vocabularies, of learning how to construct an argument that will withstand criticism and prove persuasive.

Taking such an approach to higher education would be to go in the very opposite direction from that of Bloom and Hirsch, who would rather teach us only what to think. Learning how to think requires a rigorous form of training that should begin long before students reach college age, before it's too late to break through prejudices.

Disposing of our ignorance will itself not bring us wisdom. Just because some assumptions are not questioned today doesn't mean they cannot be or will not be tomorrow, before we finally rest content with them.

Critical thinking is a technique that also requires the active participation of teacher and student one-on-one, where, instead of pronouncements made and memorized, insight is achieved one step at a time, after honest mutual confrontation.

U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett has said that classroom education can just as easily involve large numbers, such as are found in Japan. That might be true if our society were so monolithic that our first assumptions were more or less uniform, or if education were just a matter of conveying facts onto an already clean slate. But this cannot be so once minds are already filled with half-truths and prejudices, with so many false beliefs. Otherwise, ignorance persists right alongside what it is that we know.

There was once a popular television program called "College Bowl" (now being revived) in which academic teams competed over the facts that each knew, spitting them out just as a well-informed computer might. It gave us the dangerous illusion that this was all that education consisted of: that you go to school to learn things from an encyclopedic list, that you do not first need to purge yourself of false beliefs. That illusion persists, perpetuated by best sellers and the secretary of education. And destroying that illusion would be a much more costly matter than merely adding to the fact that we all should know, for it would require first

learning how to think.

MIRACLES, MIRACLES

BAS Board member and physicist SHAWN CARLSON appeared on a Bay Area TV program with three women who told us about their miracles.

The first was a nun who has journeyed 18 times to Yugoslavia to witness first-hand the conversations six teenagers have with the Virgin. In 1981, the teens first saw Our Lady in what they described as a flash of light.

The place has now become a shrine, and pilgrims from all over the world flock by the millions to see the commemorative cross the villagers have erected on the mountain overlooking the town and to listen to the teens converse with the Blessed Mother. The nun says none can see Mary when She is with the youths, but they all know She is there because the teens are so sincere. (One wonders if the Pope might not feel a little slighted, not being included in the epiphany. If memory serves correct, John Paul has never had the privilege of an audience with the most venerated woman in Christianity. Does Mary have no sense of protocol?) For the past seven years, after all these daily conversations, what does the good nun say the Mother of God has to say to us?

"There must be peace."

According to sister, there have been thousands of pictures taken of a miraculous occurrence in connection with the cross on the hill, and she had one ready for the TV cameras. The anticipation of actually witnessing a picture of a miracle was quickly deflated as it was so blurry that she had to tell us what it was.

One could barely make out the cross on an almost black background, and an oblong, white flare from the base of the cross to the bottom of the picture. That was the Virgin. Thousands of pictures, and the best she had to show us was one so fuzzy it could have passed for one of Robert Sheaffer's famous UFO hoaxes. She said that the shaft of light could never be seen by the cross itself -- only in pictures when they were developed. Shawn could have discussed lens aberrations and reflections in camera equipment, not to mention poor or fake developing procedures, but he was only given about 4 minutes of the half-hour show.

Sister says her rosary bead chains have been changed from silver to gold. In fact, this transmutation phenomenon is so common that it happens here in the States when people are just TALKING about the place! The alchemists are turning copper green with envy.

When Shaw asked if the chain could be tested, sister hedged and said that the chain might not be gold, but just a gold color. No matter. Let's look at the COLOR, then.

"The chains aren't the important thing", she wavered, "the miraculous appearance of the Virgin is what is important. The turning of the chain is only to get our attention."

She would not consent to any analysis. Shawn assured the nun that analysis would surely get the attention of a lot of people if it turned out like she said.

End of questioning.

The next woman, and Oregonian, had come to tell us about an angel that appeared on her TV screen. The angel telepathically communicates with her and the crowds that frequently assemble in her living room. (Angels know about the video portion but have not yet learned to use the audio circuitry.) She showed us a picture someone had taken of her set and assured us the image was not produced by any of the stations (she had called them) and she continued her in-depth investigation by asking her neighbors if they had angels on their screens. Unfortunately, none of her neighbors were either psychiatrists or TV repairmen, or they might have had something to tell her.

Shawn was not given the opportunity to respond to her.

With this quality of miracles, could the last one be any worse? Let's continue to watch. The last lady related her tale of woe about her allergy condition that had become so debilitating she could barely function. It was suggested that she try a novena in a devotion to St. Jude. (For all you irrepressible heretics out there, the novena consists of nine prayers, nine times a day for nine days.) In desperation she tried it. The long and short of it is that it worked and now she is fit as a fiddle. Proof of a miracle.

Would it work with an octena?

Shawn was only afforded a few minutes to talk about his "weeping icon" and a little bit about skepticism in general.

The program could have been very interesting had Shawn been given half the program to ask some serious questions. Perhaps the world is not quite ready for sober confrontation to some of the things people hold dear. Shawn's calmness and restraint in the face of this nonsense was admirable.

STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES OF CULT MIND CONTROL

Richard Gallyot, a San Francisco cult-buster extraordinaire, will be the featured speaker at the February BAS meeting.

In twenty years of investigating cults, Richard Gallyot has

interviewed nearly every survivor of Jonestown, had at least one source shot and killed, covered the Larry Layton trial for KPFA, and received a twelve-page fan letter from Charles Manson!

We've got to educate ourselves and our children to recognize cult come-ons and tricks. In this way we can immunize ourselves against their mind control. Against this background, Richard will present a compact lesson in cult tricks and tactics. During the talk, he will present portions of a rare 1976 People's Temple video tape showing Jim Jones performing "miracles".

Join BAS for an important and educational presentation.

Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

The above are selected articles from the February, 1988 issue of "BASIS", the monthly publication of Bay Area Skeptics. You can obtain a free sample copy by sending your name and address to BAY AREA SKEPTICS, 4030 Moraga, San Francisco, CA 94122-3928 or by leaving a message on "The Skeptic's Board" BBS (415-648-8944) or on the 415-LA-TRUTH (voice) hotline.

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